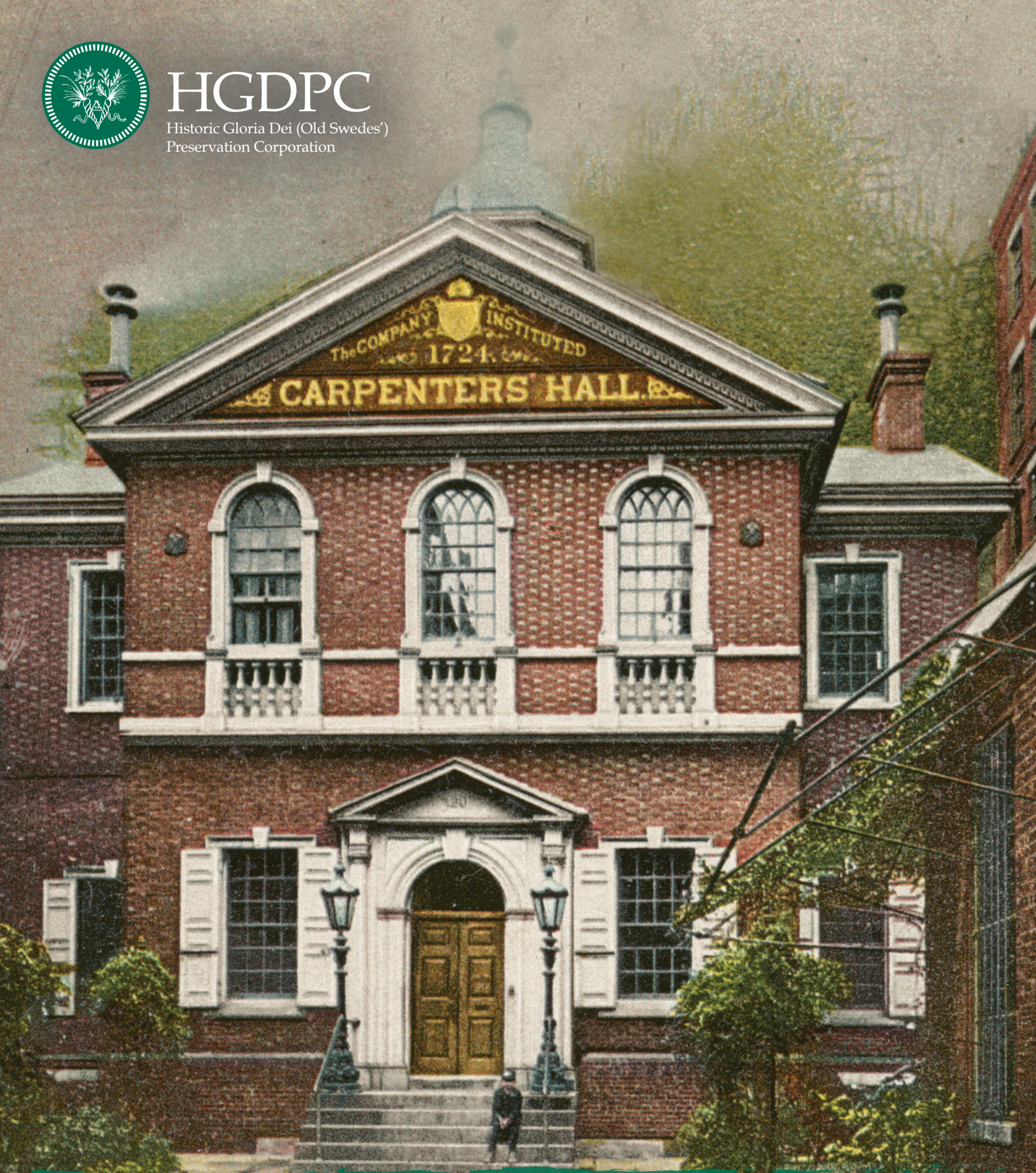




# HGDPC

Historic Gloria Dei (Old Swedes')  
Preservation Corporation



*The Stewarts of Carpenters' Hall*



# A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

By Candace Roberts



Candace Roberts,  
Chair of the Board

Dear Friends:

This issue of *Founders Magazine* highlights a story demonstrating again, our inter-connectiveness with early Philadelphia. Not long ago, we were contacted by Alex Palma, the Assistant Director of Carpenters' Hall in Old City, Philadelphia. Alex found one of our collection boxes from the middle 1800s in a storage closet. This started an investigation – how did this piece of Gloria Dei history come to be in possession of the Carpenters' Company? We learned it was donated by the Stewart family, who were long-time members of Gloria Dei Church, carpenters by trade, hired caretakers of Carpenters' Hall, and now permanent residents in our historic churchyard. We follow the work of the Stewart men and women, where they lived, and how they lived. This glimpse of Philadelphia life in the 1800s is surprisingly detailed. I think you will enjoy learning about the Stewarts and the close connection between Gloria Dei Church and the Carpenters' Company!

Spring is apparent everywhere in the Gloria Dei campus. Trees and flowers are blooming as you would expect, but we are also seeing the return of migrating and local birds. As we continue to follow COVID-19 rules for opening the Church and buildings, the churchyard continues to be 100% open for your recreation and pleasure. You can enjoy this tranquil, yet energizing property, with the gentle rustling of the trees and the symphony of hopeful bird song. This historic property is truly a respite from hectic urban life.

Please read about our Keystone Grant Project on page 7 and consider a gift today. We are nearing completion of the current project and have begun raising funds to replace the roof in 2026. It will be a very big and expensive undertaking! However, this proactive action will avoid any long-term closure of the Church due to unsafe conditions. The Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation depends on contributed support to keep our buildings safe and accessible, and our green space a place of serenity for all. Thank you!

Respectfully submitted,  
Candace Roberts



**About the Author:** Michael Schreiber is a writer living in Queen Village. He has served on the Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation board since 2017. Many of his articles on the history of Philadelphia and Early America appear on his website [www.philahistory.org](http://www.philahistory.org).

On the cover: Carpenters' Hall, Philadelphia, Pa., Detroit Publishing Company (1901). Courtesy of the New York Public Library.



HGDPC

Historic Gloria Dei (Old Swedes')  
Preservation Corporation

Columbus Blvd. & Christian Sts., Philadelphia, PA 19147

phone // 215.645.2755 • email // [preserveoldswedes@gmail.com](mailto:preserveoldswedes@gmail.com) • web // [www.preserveoldswedes.org](http://www.preserveoldswedes.org)

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Candace Roberts, Board Chair • Christine Pickup, Treasurer • Amy Grant, Corporate Secretary  
Jeanette Woehr, Vice Chair • Terry Brasko, Trustee • Joshua Thomas Castaño, Trustee  
Thomas Daley AIA, emeritus • Mike Duffy, Advisor • Marco Federico, Trustee  
Mark Roberts, Trustee • Mary Ryan, Trustee • Alan Segal, Trustee • Michael Schreiber, Trustee • Ray Spera, Advisor  
Robert A. Stewart, Trustee • Jerry Walker, Trustee • Rev. Dr. Kim-Eric Williams, emeritus

## FOUNDERS MAGAZINE

Volume 3, No. 2, is published by the Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation,  
a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (Federal ID# 45-3210057). All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.



# THE STEWARTS OF CARPENTERS' HALL

Members of the Stewart family, buried in the churchyard of Gloria Dei (Old Swedes' Church), had a long relationship with another important Philadelphia landmark — Carpenters' Hall. The latter building, home to the Carpenters' Company, served as the site of the First Continental Congress in 1774 and of the founding assembly of the state of Pennsylvania in 1776.

Several generations of Stewart men worked as carpenters. In 1780, John Stewart, a house carpenter, and his wife Sarah purchased ground and built a house at 17 Plum Street (now Monroe Street) in the district of Southwark, today called Queen Village. Their near neighbors included several carpenters, mariners, two bakers, an oysterman, a breeches maker, and a clerk. The street still contains a number of 18th-century buildings; the house now standing at the probable site where the Stewarts lived (217 Monroe St.) might be the one that they knew, although the facade appears to date from a slightly later period.

John Stewart passed away in 1799, and his widow, Sarah, established a shop at the house (probably selling groceries), which she ran for many years while raising a number of children.

Sarah's and John's son James was the first of their children; he was born at the Plum Street house in 1787. As a youth, James Stewart might have gone to sea in order to help support his fatherless family (in later life, James was often addressed as "Captain"). Around 1809, he married Sarah Potter (born in New Jersey in 1790) at Gloria Dei. Their eldest son, Reuben, who later became a carpenter, was born about 1810, and their eldest daughter, Elizabeth, arrived in 1815. John, also a carpenter, was

born in 1816, Sarah in 1818, James W. (later a sea captain) in 1824, Catherine (Kate) in 1827, Martha in 1829, Thomas in 1830, and Margaret in 1835.

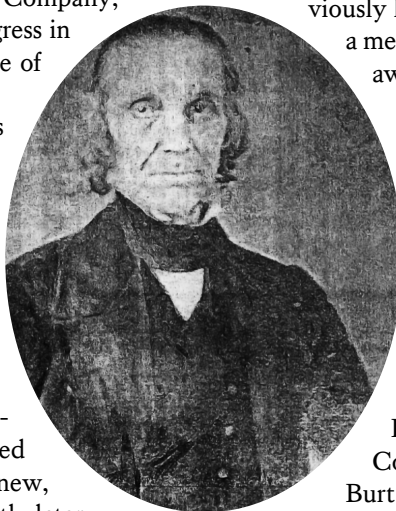
By 1818, at age 31, James Stewart was listed at 17 Plum Street as a carpenter, his father's old trade. He was elected to the Carpenters' Company in 1833. Although the Stewart family was obviously happy over James's distinction, the year came to a melancholy end after James's mother, Sarah, passed away in October.

One year before his election, according to Stewart family tradition, James worked on the partial demolition of the old Robert Morris mansion at Sixth and Market Streets, where Presidents Washington and Adams had resided in the 1790s.

A facsimile of a handwritten note by Martha Stewart in the archives of Carpenters' Hall indicates that James Stewart constructed a box from portions of a fireplace mantel from the President's House and gave it to the Carpenters' Company. Descendants of merchant Nathaniel Burt, who had purchased the house in 1832 in order to convert it into shops, stated as early as 1875 that Burt had saved a mantel from the second-floor drawing room and several other items and installed them in his new townhouse at 1203 Walnut Street (now a parking garage).<sup>1</sup> It is not clear whether that mantel, which eventually came to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and today is on loan to Mount Vernon, is the same one that was attributed to Stewart's donation.

It might have been during this time that James Stewart also donated a collection box from Old Swedes' Church to the Carpenters' Company. The wooden box, smaller than a shoebox, with a knobbed handle, is still in the Company's collection.

<sup>1</sup> See article by Edward Lawler Jr. at <http://www.ushistory.org/presidenthouse/history/pmhb/ph1.php>.



(Above) Builders at work in the 19th century. (Inset) Portrait of James Stewart. Portrait of James Stewart courtesy of Carpenters' Hall.





"Washington's Residence, High Street." Lithograph by William L. Breton (1830).  
Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

A joyous occasion arrived for the Stewart family when, on March 29, 1837, the eldest daughter, Elizabeth, now 22 years old, married Samuel V. Roberts, a carpenter and also keeper of the U.S. Arsenal. The Roberts' daughter Annie Sarah was born a little more than nine months later (Jan. 14, 1838), followed by four more children during the next decade.

At the end of the 1840s, however, tragedy struck—and many times in succession. In March 1847, Sarah P. Kesler, the 28-year-old daughter of James and Sarah Stewart, died. Then, in the summer of 1849, her sister Elizabeth Roberts was taken ill with cholera and died on July 20. Barely three weeks later, Elizabeth's one-year-old baby, Thomas, also died. Elizabeth and her son are buried at Gloria Dei, next to Sarah Kesler.

Samuel V. Roberts, obviously distraught over the deaths of two of his loved ones, left for California; it was the year of the Gold Rush. He died barely two years later, Nov. 19, 1851, and was buried in San Francisco.

The Roberts' daughters, deprived of their parents, came to live with their grandparents, James and Sarah Stewart. The children included Annie and her sisters Isabella, Alice, and Rebecca. Unfortunately, Annie died in January 1854 at age 16; she is buried at Gloria Dei with her mother and baby brother.

In the meantime, in May 1851, Sarah's daughter Kate married a carpenter from Wilmington, Del., Edward Gilpin Hirons. Her new husband had suffered a serious accident five years earlier when a sudden storm hit Wilmington. He was crushed by falling timbers when tornado-like winds blew down a carpenter's shop where he was working. The couple moved permanently to Philadelphia a few years after their marriage.

## THE STEWARTS ARRIVE AT CARPENTERS' HALL

In that year, 1854, the Stewart family moved from Plum Street to 2 Carpenters' Court, in a house in the narrow alley that leads from Chestnut Street to Carpenters' Hall. "Captain" James Stewart, now 67, seems to have retired from active work in the carpenters' trade, and now worked for the Carpenters' Company to carry out janitorial and maintenance work at the Hall and per-

haps at nearby buildings. His wife Sarah assisted him in the job.

For the last thirty years, the Carpenters' Company had been holding its meetings at New Hall, a small building in the alley, while it rented the larger Carpenters' Hall to C.J. Wohlbert for use as an auction house. During this period, the historic building had a large sign, "Philadelphia Auction Mart," plastered over the front door, and the alley was often filled with furniture and other goods that the auctioneer had on sale.

For a year or so after the Stewarts moved their residence, their son John occupied the old house at 17 Plum Street. John had begun a career as a carpenter, like his father and older brother Reuben. But in the 1850s he changed his occupation in Philadelphia street directories to that of "architect" and soon became eminent in the field. Since 1852, John Stewart had partnered with Samuel Sloan, at their office at Sixth and Walnut Streets. The Sloan-Stewart firm was responsible for the design and construction of many schools and also many villas in the new and prosperous suburb of West Philadelphia — including the magnificent mansion of Andrew M. Eastwick at Bartram's Garden. In the early 1870s John commissioned and designed the "John Stewart Houses" at 1020-1028 Spruce St., a row of Italianate-style brownstone buildings that are on Philadelphia's official list of protected historical landmarks.

The youngest of the Stewart brothers, James W., turned his back on the carpenter's trade and opted for the adventurous life of a mariner. He and his young New York-born wife Josephine (19 years old in 1850) moved in for a short time with the family of his brother Reuben. They then moved to Hazel Alley (now Naudain, east of Second), and finally to Cox's Alley (later Senate St. and now Monroe, east of Front St.). In 1855, James was listed at 31 Senate St., and it appears that his family moved to New Orleans shortly afterward. He, Josephine, and a child lost their lives in a shipwreck the following year when a



Box created by James Stewart out of the President's House fireplace mantel.  
Courtesy of Carpenters' Hall.

tremendous hurricane smashed into the Louisiana coast.<sup>2</sup>

On Feb. 18, 1856, James Stewart Sr. passed away. His funeral took place at Carpenters' Hall (still used as an auction house), from which a procession proceeded to the churchyard at Gloria Dei.

Two months later, on April 28, 1856, the Carpenters' Company, meeting in the New Hall, resolved to take steps to terminate the lease to Wohlbert for his auction and to move back into the old hall for its sessions.<sup>3</sup> The Company's Managing Committee was assigned to take immediate measures for the "fitting up" of Carpenters' Hall, while taking special care "to preserve as much as possible every feature in said hall as it now exists indicative of its original finish."<sup>4</sup>

The move to re-use and "preserve" the building reflected the new appreciation of American history, especially of the Revolutionary War period, that was unfolding in the 1850s. The books

2. An account of their demise was published in the Spring 2020 edition of *Founders Magazine*.

3. Isaksen, Mark (1992). "Early Concepts of Historic Preservation: The Restoration of Carpenters' Hall, 1857-1876" (Masters thesis). University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa. This is available on-line as a useful reference describing the "refitting" of Carpenters' Hall. Unfortunately, the author makes several serious errors, including often mixing up Sarah Stewart with her daughter Martha.

4. *Minutes of Carpenters' Company, 1856*.

of writers like George Lippard, recounting the heroic and legendary acts of revolutionary figures such as George Washington, had huge readerships. Historical paintings like Emmanuel Leutze's "Washington Crossing the Delaware" (1851) were also popular.

By that time, practically all of the veterans of the American Revolution had died. And some commentators pointed to the fact that, in the face of economic "progress," notable buildings of historical merit were also fast disappearing. The dismantling of George Washington's executive mansion two decades earlier, in which James Stewart had played a part, was an example of this.

In his novel "The Quaker City" (1845) Lippard even described a time in the near future in which corrupt city officials would have torn down Independence Hall in order to build a lavish municipal palace (several decades later, the city administration in fact did consider carrying out that action). Many in Philadelphia feared that if care were not taken, almost all visible reminders of the revolutionary past would soon be consigned to books and paintings. The Carpenters' Company members responded to that sentiment by seeking to preserve their historic building, while modernizing it slightly in order to better serve its original function as a meeting hall.

By June 1857, work on "refitting" Carpenters' Hall was in full swing. Most of the major changes took place on the second floor of the building; the interior was divided into two sections, bisected by a hallway. On one side, the carpenters constructed a commodious library, which also was to be used as a meeting room (most of the bookcases and paneling currently in the room apparently date to an 1868 renovation). On the other side, living quarters were built for the family of the Superintendent (also called the "janitor" and the "keeper") of Carpenters' Hall.

## SARAH BECOMES SUPERINTENDENT

The Company appointed Sarah Stewart as Superintendent. The choice was a logical one. Since she had been living next to the hall and helping her husband in janitorial and gardening tasks, she was known and liked by Company members. Moreover, Sarah had recently become a widow, and would need additional income in order to raise nine-year-old Rebecca and 14-year-old Alice, the daughters of Elizabeth Roberts. (Another of Elizabeth's daughters, Isabella Toomer, had married and was living in Alabama).

For some months after her husband's death, Sarah had been living at the former home of her son James W. Stewart, the ship captain, at 31 Senate St. (Cox's Alley). Soon after James and his family had moved to New Orleans, the tragic news came that they were lost at sea.

A year later, in late July 1857, the restoration of Carpenters' Hall, though still not finished, had progressed to the extent that

Sarah and her family were able to move into the second-floor apartment. Joining her were granddaughters Rebecca and Alice Roberts, as well as her own daughters Martha and Margaret. The family might have felt cramped in the space, and perhaps annoyed in their first month of residency by the hammering and sawing that went on to complete the renovations. But nonetheless, they must have been cheered by the modern conveniences in their new home — gas lighting, two indoor bathrooms, a comfortable parlor with a fireplace, and a full kitchen with a gas range.

Sarah's duties went far beyond janitorial work. She was also given the responsibility of supervising the Carpenters' Company's library, which lent books on a wide range of topics to members and their families. Sarah also planted and maintained the small garden on the Carpenters' Hall grounds — just as she had done while her husband was still alive. Sarah also served as a tour guide for visitors who wished to see the hall and its collection of framed documents and artifacts from the carpenters' trade and from the period of the Revolution.

The 1860 census contains the names of the Stewart family members living at Carpenters' Hall: Margaret, 25, had gotten a job as a teacher. (Later that same year, she married her cousin James Rodes, a cabinetmaker, and their eldest child, Aline, was born in September of the following year.) Alice Roberts, 18, also worked as a teacher in 1860, while Martha Stewart, 30, helped her 70-year-old mother in maintaining Carpenters' Hall and in raising 13-year-old Rebecca Roberts.

During the Civil War, the Stewarts took part in fundraising activities at Carpenters' Hall for the war effort. Privately, they had concern for the safety of Kate's husband, Edward Gilpin Hiron, who enlisted in August 1862 and served as a second lieutenant in the Pennsylvania infantry for six months. He resigned three weeks after the Battle of Fredericksburg — a catastrophic and humiliating Union defeat.

On Feb. 16, 1872, after acting as guardian of Carpenters' Hall for twenty-six years, Sarah Stewart died after a lingering illness. She was 82. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Feb. 20, 1872), the funeral was held at the Hall a day earlier and "nearly all the members of the Carpenters' Company" joined in the procession from the Hall to Old Swedes' Church, where the funeral sermon was preached at her graveside. Her remains were interred beside those of her husband, who had died exactly sixteen years earlier.

## "AUNT MAR": A BELOVED PRESENCE

Following her mother's death, Martha Stewart, who had shared many of the responsibilities at Carpenters' Hall, serving particularly in the role of librarian, was provisionally appointed Superintendent. In May 1872, Martha was hired on a permanent basis at a salary of \$50 a month. The Company also gave her \$250 "for expenses related to her Mother's sickness and funeral" (Carpenters' Company minutes, May 5, 1872).



(Inset, top) Sarah Stewart in 1842.

Courtesy of Carpenters' Hall.

(Inset, bottom) Martha Stewart, age 35, pictured in an 1863 photo album of Gloria Dei Sunday School teachers.

Courtesy of Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church.



Martha Stewart soon became a noted and beloved figure at Carpenters' Hall. She played a major role in the activities staged at the hall during the 1876 Centennial celebration. That year saw close to 70,000 people visit the hall, although the heavy crowds engendered the need for major "cleansing," painting, and repairs following the close of the Centennial. On Jan. 17, 1877, Martha was commended for her "ladylike bearing in greeting visitors to the Hall" during the Centennial.

Some time before 1880, Aline Rodes, the daughter of Martha's sister Margaret came to live at Carpenters' Hall. Aline is listed there in the 1880 census along with William F. Hirons, 26, the son of Martha's sister Kate, who was working as a clerk at a bank.

The teenaged Aline regularly helped her "Aunt Mar," as everyone affectionately called Martha, in maintenance duties at the hall. Perhaps her mother, Margaret Rodes, was ill at this time; she died in 1883 at age 48 and was buried at Laurel Hill Cemetery.

In December 1887, Martha hosted a wedding reception for Aline at Carpenters' Hall; the groom was Charles W. Benedict, a wealthy young man from Findley, Ohio. The ceremony was conducted at Gloria Dei. A contemporary newspaper commented on the stark contrast between the High Society people who attended the wedding and the relatively poor residents of the neighborhood surrounding the church: "Long lines of carriages were drawn up last night, and as they alighted ladies in festal evening dress, with the stamp of high breeding, passed with their escorts through the motley throng of stevedores and fishwomen, who perhaps had never seen such a sight before."

The paper commented on the bride: "Very pretty she looked as with her brunette beauty set off by the white veil, the bride walked up the aisle leaning on the arm of her father [James Rodes]." After the ceremony, the couple left for Ohio.

In the early morning of Feb. 8, 1893, Martha Stewart passed away at Carpenters' Hall at the age of 64. Her death was noted in newspapers around the country. She had been ill with an inflammation of the stomach, and absent from her caretaking duties, since the first day of the year. A day before her death, Kate Hirons confirmed for the newspapers that "Miss Stewart is Dying."

In Martha's obituary, the papers commented that "her face has been a familiar one to men who have grown aged and whitehaired while following commercial pursuits in the business heart of Philadelphia." Private services were held at Martha's residence in Carpenters' Hall, and the funeral took place at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church, where Martha was interred.

In the files at Carpenters' Hall today, there is a copy of a photograph that is said to depict Martha Stewart in her later years. She is shown seated at a desk next to a window in the second-floor library at Carpenters' Hall. Another photo in the file (shown at the top of page 5) is likewise labeled "Martha Stewart" although the subject appears to be a different woman (with darker hair) than the one in the library. In my opinion, because it shows an elderly woman in dress that is appropriate to around the 1840s, there is very little doubt that the subject is really Sarah Stewart, Martha's mother. ❁



(Above) Photo of Martha Stewart in her later years, seated in the second-floor library of Carpenters' Hall. Bookshelves, installed in 1868, are still there today. (Inset) Collection box from Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church in the artifacts collection of Carpenters' Hall. The label explains that it was donated on behalf of James Stewart, deceased. Images courtesy of Carpenters' Hall



# PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION

*Some buildings call to us to be preserved. These few, and very special buildings, tell important stories. A building that has stood for over 300 years on American soil gives us a glimpse of eternity on our home turf. America is a young country compared to our international counterparts. For us, 300 years standing means something. Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church is one of these buildings, telling the story of the Swedish people coming to the Delaware Valley in the 1600s, seeking commerce with the Lenape, and becoming an integral part of the Philadelphia story. We have nearly completed our repair and painting project with your support to provide the matching funds for this grant. Following are some before and after photos to show you how far we have come!*



Riverside Hall's stained glass window was in danger of collapsing.



The rot under the window was removed and repaired.



All of the first floor woodwork was repaired and painted.



The back wall of the church had severe water damage.



The back wall of the church after the repair was completed.



The paint colors are accurate to the 1800s renovation of the church.



The marble plaques were protected during the restoration process.



Pennsylvania  
Historical & Museum  
Commission



We are filled with gratitude to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to help support our preservation work on the Church and Riverside Hall with a Keystone Grant. Thank you to QVNA, our 100 Founding Members, our Friends donors, and especially those who have sent repeat gifts over the years. These sustaining gifts acknowledge that historic preservation work is a marathon. **Your support helps our volunteer board care for this unique property and campus. We value your participation in this mission.**

# WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

*The Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation does not receive government funding for our operations. All of our projects and endeavors are made possible by the talent and dedication of our board of volunteers. Your support is crucial for the preservation of this irreplaceable architectural and cultural landmark. Any donation you make will help us do more to uncover hidden stories, repair this historic property and preserve this living history museum for future generations. **You can make a one-time donation or become a sustainer.***



## FRIENDS OF OLD SWEDES

Make a one-time donation of **any amount** you desire.



## LANDMARK CIRCLE

Restore this historic property by making an **annual pledge of \$250**.



## 100 FOUNDING MEMBERS

Pay **\$1,000** or pledge **\$1,000**; limited spots available.



## PRESERVATION ASSEMBLY

Sustain this irreplaceable site by making an **annual pledge of \$500**.



## LEGACY GIFTS

Give through a **will, a trust, an IRA, real estate or stocks**.



## HERITAGE COUNCIL

Preserve this national treasure by making an **annual pledge of \$750**.

*All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

Visit our website to learn more about the benefits of giving to the Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation. We accept most major credit cards. Recurring payments can be scheduled on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. Checks can be mailed to: HGDP, 916 S. Swanson St., Phila, PA 19147.

[www.preserveoldswedes.org/donate](http://www.preserveoldswedes.org/donate)

## 100 FOUNDING MEMBERS

*Supporting Our Foundation*

- Kristina Antoniadis, MD
- In Honor of Ronald S. Beatty
- Ann Blackstone
- Terry Brasko
- Margaret Sooy Bridwell
- Jerome Buescher
- Margaret Buescher
- Rev. Patricia Cashman
- Barbara Chilcott
- Jill M. D'Andrea
- Jill Duink
- Paul Fejko, Composer, Organist
- Amy Grant
- Paul Grant, PhD
- Bishop Gutiérrez on behalf of the Diocese of Pennsylvania
- Ronald A. Hendrickson, Esq.
- Mike Holstein
- In Memory of Robert F. Lucid
- Lucid Digital Designs
- The Heather & Tom Myers Family
- Sandra Pfaff
- Christine Pickup
- *in honor of* Kathryn McQuiston Pickup
- J&M Preservation Studio
- Quantum-Think
- Reeves McEwing, LLP
- Candace Roberts
- Mark Roberts
- Eric Michael Sanchez
- David E. Sandels
- Alan Segal
- Rev. Joy Segal
- Pamela Sjogren
- Wade Sjogren
- Robert A. Stewart, Esq.
- *in honor of* the Founding Lutheran Ministers (1697-1831): Andreas Rudman, Johan Dylander, Gabriel Nasman, Olof Parlin, Carl Magnus Wrangel, Nils Collin
- The Swedish Colonial Society
- Margaretha Talerman
- John B. Tepe, Jr.
- Rev. Dr. Kim-Eric Williams
- Jeanette Woehr